DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 294 TM 035 380

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TITLE	Faculty Perspectives of the Blackboard Course Delivery System.
PUB DATE	2003-11-00
NOTE	24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Biloxi, MS, November 5-7, 2003).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Faculty; Delivery Systems; Educational Technology; Higher Education; Online Systems; *Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*Blackboard Instructional Planner

ABSTRACT

This study was a qualitative examination of faculty perceptions about the Blackboard 5 learning platform. The study took place within the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham during the fall of 2001. The study involved content analysis of cases developed from recorded interviews of conversations with faculty members concerning their experiences with the Blackboard course delivery system. Interviews were conducted with five participants, four who were Blackboard users and one who chose not to use Blackboard in his class. Ten categories emerged from content analysis. Several of these categories were similar and revolved around the benefits of increased communication/collaboration/community through online instruction. (Author/SLD)

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Faculty Perspectives of the Blackboard Course Delivery System

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TM035380

Notes: Qualitative research paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Biloxi, MS, November 2003. For more information contact the author at jeffanderson@uab.edu

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study of faculty perceptions about the Blackboard 5 learning platform. The study took place within the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham during the Fall of 2001. The study involved content analysis of cases developed from recorded interviews of conversations with faculty members concerning their experiences with the Blackboard course delivery system. Interviews were conducted with five participants, four who were Blackboard users, and one who chose not to use Blackboard in his classes. Ten categories emerged from content analysis. Several of these categories were similar and revolved around the benefits of increased communication / collaboration / community through online instruction.

Introduction

With the explosion of the Internet, and the increasing number of consumers who have home computers, the world of commerce has become even more competitive. In many industries, if your company does not have a web presence, you could find yourself chasing the competition and falling further behind. This information age has magnified the consumer's thirst for information/products/services in a timely fashion. Today, "timely" is much more immediate than in the past.

Nowhere has the evolution of the Internet been more evident than in education. The benefits are astounding. Students can now get access to libraries and resources all around the world with the click of a computer mouse button. What once took days to research in the local or campus library, now often can be done in hours from the comfort of the student's home or dorm room. Video conferencing opens up a world of possibilities as students gain the benefit of guest lecturers from all over the globe. It's easy to see how the concept of the course delivery system was born. Course delivery systems consist of a web site, or series of web sites that incorporate many of the Internet's tools to support instruction. Through the years, these systems have become more complete, and easier to use. Today, there are several course shell systems that provide the ability to create a course delivery site with relative ease. The UAB School of Education has been exposed to several of these, including Learning Space, Web Course in a Box, WebCT, and Blackboard (formerly CourseInfo). In 1998, we made a decision to standardize to CourseInfo. In 1999, Blackboard, Inc. released version 5 of its CourseInfo product, renaming it "*Blackboard 5*." The UAB School of Education has continued to use Blackboard as a course delivery platform.

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This study is a review of how the Blackboard system is working for the School of Education faculty. The goal of the study is to document the perceptions of School of Education faculty towards the use of Blackboard as a course delivery system. Not all faculty choose to use the system. Both Blackboard users and those who choose not to use Blackboard were interviewed for this study. One purpose of the study is to learn where the system is failing to meet faculty expectations, as well as what faculty like about the system. As an instructor and a student who relies on Blackboard, I am very interested in how the system is viewed by faculty. As assistant director of the Office of Academic Computing and Technology, I was heavily involved in the decision to implement CourseInfo (Blackboard) in the School of Education. As a researcher, I must recognize a bias towards Blackboard, as well as the perception I may be biased in favor of the system. However, as an instructor of Education Technology courses, having relied on Blackboard to support instruction, I have also developed some strong reservations about the use of course delivery systems, in general. As a student who has used Blackboard in some of my graduate courses, I have developed both positive and negative feelings about Blackboard. Finally, as system administrator, I have first-hand knowledge of Blackboard's customer support system and its limitations. As a researcher, I strive to remain aware of these biases and keep them in check during my evaluation of the data gathered for this study.

Literature Review

The Internet and online instruction have had an impact on how we teach and how students learn. Researchers such as Wegerif(1998) and Brown(2001) discussed the development of community and increased communication through online learning. In addition to the development of community, Wegerif(1998) found that student work improved due to their peers' ability to view the work online, making it somewhat public.

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Carvendale(2003) wrote "Professors at many universities say that course-management software helps them organize their courses better and brings new levels of interaction both among students and between students and professors."(p. A26) However, the study in his research reported course-management systems to be perceived as inflexible by faculty, and difficult to use by students. The Wisconsin study concluded that professors generally saw course-management systems as "good organizational tools for teaching, research, and administration."(p. A26)

Van der Veen(2001) found that students working in online courses expect rapid feedback on their work, and often post work multiple times when they do not receive feedback in a timely manner.

Method

Qualitative research often relies on purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) of a limited number of information-rich cases. The approach used in this study consisted of selecting five faculty members from a list of volunteers. The selection process was to include the first five volunteers, while taking care to make sure the composition of the participant group accurately reflected the composition of the volunteer population with respect to race, sex, and whether the volunteer actually uses Blackboard. Both Blackboard users and non-users were included to get a broader perspective of how faculty members view the system. This adds to the overall credibility of the study, by taking into account reasons why some faculty may choose not to use Blackboard. Each of the participants was interviewed in uniquely different locations of his or her preference. All volunteers were faculty members within the UAB School of Education during the Fall 2001 Semester.

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Any suggestions made as a result of this study are based solely on the perceptions of these individuals, and are not generalizable.

Design

This study is based on the phenomenological inquiry approach. Each participant was interviewed in various settings, allowing the interviewer/researcher to pick up on cues and nuances that include valuable data. This approach allows the inclusion of information about the environment and situation in the study. Often, these have a major impact on the information offered during the interview process. Interviews were transcribed, followed by a content analysis to identify themes. I then performed a cross-case analysis to further develop these themes.

As the participants have varied backgrounds and technical expertise, many of the responses were quite different in overall content. However, distinct themes did emerge in all of the interviews. An attempt was made to address these differences in order to reduce generalizability, as suggested by Patton. (1990) One of the aspects of qualitative research is it allows the researcher to develop categories through the research, itself. Often qualitative research leads to a larger quantitative study, based on categories or emergent themes.

Having said that, we must remember that this study is indeed qualitative, and any data or findings are limited to the participants involved.

Methods of Rigor

During this study, I took several steps to ensure its rigor. These steps included:

Insuring Credibility

In qualitative research, much of the validity of the findings is a direct result of the researcher. The person is the instrument in qualitative research. My qualifications to study perceptions of

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the Blackboard system include several years experience administering course delivery systems, as well as the development of course support web sites. I also have experience as an instructor using WebCT, Web Course in a Box, CourseInfo, and now Blackboard. As a student, I have used Blackboard on several occasions. Patton points out that in qualitative research, the investigator should strive for "empathic neutrality", by identifying and reflecting on possible sources of bias.(Patton, 1990, p. 55) Having all this experience in the roles of student, faculty, and administrator, you may assume I have a bias towards the Blackboard system's positive aspects. While I am very aware of Blackboard's appealing features, I also get to see many more of the negative aspects of the system, as administrator. From a faculty frame, I have some strong reservations about the use of course delivery systems, in general. I think these biases, along with my realization they exist, increase the credibility of this study. Some tools I used to increase credibility include:

Member checking

Each participant was allowed to review the transcript or summary of his or her interview. Participants were offered the prerogative to make changes, additions or deletions to his/her transcript/summary. These changes were incorporated into the data of this study.

Peer debriefing

I discussed this study with my peers. I also engaged in debriefing with one of my peers, and reviewed his comments, taking them into consideration during the course of this study.

Triangulation

Triangulation was established through member checking, peer debriefing, interviewing multiple participants, and performing a content analysis of the interviews. Through the

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use of multiple views from my own experience, as well as those of the participants, I sought to achieve "theory/perspective triangulation".(Patton, 1990, p. 46)

Establishing Transferability

Transferability allows the reader to immerse himself into the situation. This helps to convey meaning and perception. Patton refers to *thick description* as a means of describing the data and setting where data is gathered as completely as possible. This allows the reader to create his or her own analysis.(Patton, 1990, p. 375) I have worked to avoid generalization and report findings in the context of each participant's unique perceptions and experiences. This will help transfer to the reader the participant's intent.

Dependability/Confirmability

The goal for dependability is to provide enough descriptive information that another researcher could follow along with the research and achieve the same results. The idea is not that someone would come to the same conclusions, but rather they can determine how I came to these conclusions.

Discussion of Emergence of Categories

Through content analysis, several categories emerged from the data. Based on a coding unit of a complete response or thought, ten categories were identified. I have used a dichotomous system of categorization. My categories are as follows:

User friendly / Intuitive This category emerged from responses dealing with the ease of use of Blackboard.

Freedom / Flexibility emerged from responses dealing with increased flexibility in the classroom, or the ability to avoid being tied to a specific meeting time and place.

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Communication evolved from comments about enhanced communication offered through Blackboard and technology, in general. While much of this category could be included in the *flexibility* or *discussion/community* categories, there was often specific mention of how communication, in general, has been enhanced by Blackboard.

New Challenges / Opportunities All of the participants mentioned some new opportunity made available through technology. Some also mentioned the new challenges posed by the use of technology to support instruction.

Productivity There were many comments about how Blackboard or technology has improved the productivity of both students and faculty.

Work load / Expectations arose as a category from several comments about the increase in work load brought on by the use of Blackboard, as well as comments about increasing expectations of both faculty and students.

Discussion / Community emerged from comments about using the Discussion Board feature in Blackboard, and in some cases, how it has created or enhanced community within classes.

Intrinsic Motivation emerged as participants talked about how Blackboard can increase students' exposure to their peers, and how they perform better for their peers.

Very Useful / Useful Features is a category designed to include comments about which features the participant found useful, as well as other positive aspects of the Blackboard system.

Negative Aspects emerged as a category, based on comments about Blackboard's limitations or comments about needed improvements.

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Cross Case Analysis

I interviewed five School of Education faculty members over a span of three weeks about their perceptions of the Blackboard system. One participant, Dr. Charles Green, is not a Blackboard user. I wanted to include the perceptions of someone who chose not to use the system in an effort to make the study more credible. My intent was to learn as much as I could about how the faculty perceived the system. This certainly should include the perceptions of those who use the system, as well as those who do not.

In addition to Dr. Green, one of our younger professors, I also interviewed Dr. Barbara Blue, Dr. Valencia Orange, Dr. Daryl Brown, and Dr. McClean Slate. All five faculty represent a cross-section of the three departments within the school. In an effort to maintain a level of anonymity, I choose not to divulge additional information about each participant.

In preparing for the interviews, I developed a list of questions. These included:

1. Tell me about your experiences using the Blackboard system.
2. How has the use of Blackboard affected your classes?
3. Elaborate on the feedback you have received from your students about Blackboard.
4. How would you improve the Blackboard system?
5. Discuss how Blackboard has changed what you do as an instructor.

While I began each interview with the first question, I allowed the conversation to follow a natural course. There may have been other questions that emerged as a result of the interview. However, all the interviews included some form of conversation about the areas within the five questions listed

Ten categories emerged through the course of the interviews. Most of these categories were readily apparent in the first interview, with Dr. Blue. As I worked through the transcripts

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of subsequent interviews, I modified the categories, somewhat. An analysis of data from each category follows.

User friendly / Intuitive: The first category that emerged, almost immediately, was that of Blackboard's interface being *user friendly or intuitive*. All four of the Blackboard users made reference to Blackboard's ease of use or intuitive features. Dr. Slate said, "So, I think it's extremely user friendly for students, in that way." One of the first statements Dr. Blue made was, "Now, talking about the specifics of Blackboard, I really think Blackboard has a competitive edge over several other course management systems, in that it is very intuitive." Then, later she said,

> So, I'm thinking with Blackboard being user friendly, and so intuitive, there is great potential for faculty and students to be self-sufficient, and they can really focus on teaching and learning, and that's where I think Blackboard really has a competitive edge.

In discussing his moving from Learning Space to Blackboard, Dr. Brown stated, "So, we gravitated to Blackboard as it came available. In so doing, since then I've used Blackboard, I believe with every course that I've had, and found it much more user friendly." Dr. Orange said,

> …I looked at Learning Space. I went to a meeting about it, and it was so overwhelming, and the hoops. I mean, you want something that is password protected, but this was just way too much. And then they had trouble. So I just thought it wasn't worth my time. But *this* [Blackboard] is definitely worth my time.

Later, when asked if she found the system easy to use, she replied, "Absolutely. And I find it very useful."

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Freedom / Flexibility: The second category revolves around Blackboard's ability to provide *freedom and flexibility*. All five participants made references to the increased flexibility offered by using online course support. In responding to the initial question, Dr. Blue said, "I think one thing is you can provide a lot of information, asynchronized information, so that can provide great flexibility to students, and also, I think expand communication beyond the class." Dr. Orange pointed out other benefits of this flexibility, beyond the classroom, "I don't know about course work, but like now, when I go to conferences and presentations, I can put stuff on Blackboard, I can go in and get it at a conference or at a presentation." Dr. Brown, early in his interview said, "I use Blackboard in combination with face-to-face instruction. Sometimes, I will hold classes, what I call *remote*, where we interact via Blackboard, exclusively, for a week. Other times I supplement with face-to-face instruction." Dr. Orange said,

> We're putting all kinds of things, PowerPoint that students develop, and whatever. Last winter was the first time I posted digital photos. And so I've done that each term, so that's been since last winter, so spring of 2001 and fall of 2001. So we've posted a lot of digital photos. And I've put student work on there starting last Summer, because they would do PowerPoint or whatever, and they would say "Oh! Can I get a copy?" and I said "Well, I can put it up here and you can download it.", so that's been good.

Dr. Slate added to this category, in terms of flexibility for the student,

> As I view that thing, it's amazing the kinds of times, the variety of times that students get on this. They are on it virtually every hour of the day. That way they are able to react to what someone else has said, or put things in there that they want, anytime.

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Later he added, "Blackboard has allowed me to do some things I've never been able to accomplish, before, as an instructor, quite frankly." Finally, Dr. Green in discussing the use of technology in general said, "We've probably spent less time, and some students may complain about this, but we've probably spent less time on rote didactic lecture, and a lot more time on analysis, critical thinking, discussion activities." All of the respondents made comments to support technology's ability to provide flexibility and freedom to change what they do in the classroom.

Communication: The third category, *communication* emerged due to specific comments about expanded communication. While most of these comments could have been grouped into other categories, I felt it was important to break it out into a separate category, due to the importance given to it by each participant. Dr. Blue made it clear how important she feels the expanded communication is, "Yes. I think, first of all it is… it's the communication. It's the information tool, and it can expand the interaction beyond the classroom… you know, after-hours access to some course information, to grades, these kinds of things." Dr. Orange gave it equal importance when she said, "…so that was really nice that I could e-mail them all in one fell swoop, which I've done probably three or four times, and it's been grand! I wish I would have done that with every class, before this one." Dr. Slate, in discussing how Blackboard has changed his classes, remarked,

> Generally, in the past, most of the communication in the classroom has been between the students and me. So I would try to get interaction among them, and structure classes in such a way as to get group activity in the class structure, itself. And accomplish that to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the nature of the students; their propensity towards that kind of interaction. But it didn't really

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> enable me to promote student-to-student interaction. Blackboard has done that beyond my wildest dreams. Now I have students communicating with one another... But the real payoff has been the ability to really get student communication improved with me, and also with students.

Later he said, "There are no excuses, now for lack of communication, because of the way this is set up…great tool." Dr. Brown, in discussing Blackboard's features, said,

> Another feature that I like about the system is being able to e-mail, self-contained within the system, itself. That poses a problem, as you know, if students haven't kept their e-mail current. It poses a problem, but that would be the same problem in any e-mail system. But it's all right there, packaged together.

New Challenges / Opportunities: The fourth category was that of *new challenges and opportunities*. I used this to group comments about new problems or challenges brought on by the technology, as well as opportunities identified for using the technology. Dr. Blue gave quite a synopsis when she said,

> I think it's a new challenge, and, because all these things: online learning, the web, all these kinds of things are new, I think there are lots of problems. There are lots of challenges, and people have to be aware that it's not like the traditional pedagogy that has been under development for hundreds of years, or in the situation of China, it's been developing for thousands of years, that you have a lot of knowledge base already established. This is new territory. A lot of us are still exploring, and learning what is the most meaningful way to use it, and, you know, detours or errors, mistakes are inevitable, but we need to be mindful how to make those potentials of technology help us in our professional lives.

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Dr. Orange pointed out a challenge as a result of how she uses Blackboard,

> So all of a sudden here's some reflection that is supposed to be uploaded to me in the drop box, and it's over there, so I'd have to send them an e-mail and say "Hey, you put this in the wrong place." So, you know, there's those kinds of little managing problems.

Dr. Slate identified an opportunity when he said, "If we go to a portfolio system for evaluation of students, I also see, ultimately, that this will help with that. I think that could be folded into this in a very nice way." He also showed concern when he said, "If people hide behind it, then it's going to be detrimental. If they try to make this replace the kinds of personal communication needed, then they are going to fail. But used as an add, this is really great."

Productivity: All four respondents who use Blackboard made some reference to how Blackboard or technology in general has increased productivity. Dr. Blue said,

> In general, I think these course management tools, again, used appropriately, can… one: help faculty spend their time more meaningfully, and two: with regard to students, can really foster a very independent learner, in the student… and I think that is very key in this age.

Dr. Blue's comments reflect increased productivity for both faculty and students. Dr. Orange, in talking about improved student productivity, said, "So, their autonomy and facility in using the capabilities, it's so much more advanced. They teach one another, and they teach me at this point. They catch right on." Dr. Brown, while discussing student expectations, pointed out one aspect of increased faculty productivity,

> Well, because it can happen. It can't happen if you turn in a hard copy paper, as a student, and you don't see the instructor for a week, unless the instructor is going

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> to mail you the work. Then there's the mailing time. So, because it can happen, yes, they want instant feedback, or as soon as possible.

Dr. Slate, while discussing changes in his department's approach to course work, stated, "I would expect our productivity in [the department] is going to be enhanced over that of other programs, as a result of what we are doing." Later he added,

> Honestly, it's been a great experience. I cannot say enough about it. It's made me a better teacher. I feel better about it. I've always felt good about what I've done, but I feel better, now I'm recharged. This has given me even new life. I feel better about what I'm doing. I'm reaching more students, more effectively, and I know they are getting more from it.

Clearly, technology has the ability to make us all more productive, if used correctly. The Blackboard users in this study have found Blackboard can increase productivity.

Work Load / Expectations: The sixth category, *workload / expectations*, emerged as a result of comments about changes in faculty workload, and changes in faculty and student expectations. Dr. Brown has found changes in both his expectations and his students' expectations. This is evident in his comments,

> The other thing that's happened that I think is an interesting phenomenon, is that students, now expect me to give them turnaround time on material in much more rapid turnover, or turn around time, than in the old method. When I can read their work and get back to them within two hours, theoretically, two days after they have submitted an assignment, they are wanting to know why I haven't commented on their work, where as in the traditional method, it's two weeks before you return papers. That's probably the norm. Even though the students

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> take their full week to do their assignment, they're wanting turn around time in 48 hours. Now, we laugh about it. It's not a big deal. But, it's on their minds.

With regard to changes in workload, he said, "... I would say that probably, maybe a 15% increase in workload." Dr. Slate said, "I work harder, now, than I've ever worked before." Dr. Slate also recognized how Blackboard has increased his expectations, "I know that I'm expecting even more from students. I'm putting more on, and so they have a lot more to read now; a lot more to react to, now, than they ever had before." Another interesting comment by Dr. Slate deals with students' expecting to have Blackboard to use in their courses,

> She didn't use Blackboard for one class that followed up with mine. And I did have students indicate to me that they were kind of disappointed. But they also noted that she talked with them about the fact that she intended to use it.

Discussion / Community: The seventh category, d*iscussion / community* emerged due to comments about the specific use of discussion boards and how they help to create community and collaboration. All five participants made comments to this effect. Dr. Blue said, "Ok, talking about building a learning community in Blackboard, I think the chat room and discussions are great tools to do that. And the instructor needs to structure this learning environment." Dr. Orange found this phenomenon particularly interesting. She said, "Oh! I think it's like a virtual community, and community is important to me as a social studies educator, and developing community." Dr. Green, in referring to students' desire to remain a part of a virtual community, said, "I've had a number of students ask that. It may be three terms ago, and they still want to be a part of that group I've even had previous users, who have graduated, still responding to the group." Dr. Green uses Yahoo Groups, so this phenomenon isn't germane to Blackboard, alone. Dr. Brown relies heavily on the Discussion Boards as the

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basis for supporting his classes. He said, "I put the assignments as threaded discussions under the Discussion Board. So, students literally go in and I start the thread with the assignment and they click on *Reply*, and submit their work as an attachment." He later talked about the importance of this approach and peer pressure.

Intrinsic Motivation : These comments support the eighth category, *intrinsic motivation.* Dr. Brown said,

> They want to be able to give it their best shot, as a couple of students have said in writing, "We do a better job, and try harder because of peer pressure, of seeing my work, more so than instructor pressure."

Dr. Blue also comments,

> And I do think for students to take the initiative for learning, they need to feel they are a part of it. You know, it's something they have intrinsic motivation about and eventually they want to internalize. That's how learning happens. You know, when they internalize that part of learning, and to involve students in constructing the knowledge base and to determine what is the learning objective and what is the outcome, is a good way to handle it. And in this online learning environment, you can really foster these kinds of things through the discussions or whatever…

Dr. Slate added,

> They don't enjoy the extra work they get [chuckling], but they really do enjoy the experience. And a lot of them, those who are not very computer literate, to begin with, remark about how much improvement they've seen in their technology skills.

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Very Useful / Useful Features: The ninth category, *very useful / useful features*, groups comments about features of Blackboard faculty find useful. All of the participants had used some of the features of Blackboard, including Dr. Green, who said,

> I also should mention, the other experience I had with Blackboard was more as a student role, with the Dean's Blackboard framework he set up this summer, dealing with proration issues, administration issues. I read a lot of messages, posted responses, encouraged other to, and suggested some links. I used that pretty much this summer.

Dr. Orange said,

> I first started using it as a grade book, which is really exciting, because I used to use Micrograde, I don't know if you know that software, and… this was nice to have everything in one place. I like being able to post the syllabus, the assignments, web sites, announcements…

Later, she said, "…and it's been grand! I wish I would have done that with every class, before this one." Dr. Slate, in addressing how he has used the system, said,

> By the way, I also like the, although it hasn't been that helpful for me in my field, the supplemental materials that Blackboard has. The have curricula of varying kinds on there. That's a nice tool as well. Like I say, it hasn't been very specific to my field, but I'm impressed. I think they are moving in the right direction.

Dr. Slate made comments about several features, "I use many of its features, right now." He then discussed several features over the next several minutes, including the integrated calendar. This was particularly interesting, since some of the other participants found the calendar difficult to use, or in need of improvement.

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Negative Aspects: The tenth category, *negative aspects*, was used to collect all comments about Blackboard's limitations or needed improvements/enhancements. Since there was a direct question dealing with problems or limitations, all participants had comments about this. I have already mentioned that two of the respondents made specific mention of the integrated calendar's limitations. Dr. Blue discussed limitations of Blackboard's integrated calendar, "Talking about one part of improvement, and again maybe I didn't know the system that well, the calendar…" and "Moving the content, the content in the calendar should be a lot easier, instead of having to do it a session by a time. If you could just have one or two clicks to move the content from one term to another term…" Dr. Slate pointed out a limitation, "Because of the amount of material I use, at times Blackboard becomes cumbersome. It seems limited in its ability to hold large amounts." And Dr. Orange discussed why she doesn't use one of Blackboard's features,

> I don't use it for testing at all, because I do different kinds of tests. I do a lot of non-traditional means of assessment as well as when I give, like I gave a test out today and I want them to discuss it, you know ideas and things like that. It's not multiple choice or short answer or anything like that.

Another interesting note is all four of the Blackboard users, when asked about improvements, mentioned video in one form or another. Dr. Blue said,

> If we can add another part that allows the camera, the video based interaction and, you know, for certain applications you need that, and for certain students, you know. So without introducing an outside tool, going into the browser to do that. But if we can, if it's all integrated into the course tools that are already there, faculty and students can individual, can schedule individual sessions. I think that probably would be pretty good.

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Dr. Brown would like to see this capability as well, "If, sometime, the technology will allow for the video component of it, as well as audio. I understand you can put, I think mini-clips in, right now." Dr. Slate would like to see it taken to a whole different level. He said, "I'll be happy when Blackboard gets to the stage it can have virtual reality." Each participant had his or her specific improvements that would make the system better fit their purpose, but the idea of video and audio support came up in three of the five interviews.

Discussion

Implications:

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, there seems to be an implication that Blackboard, and technology in general, may improve communications, foster community, increase productivity, and increase expectations of students and faculty. These findings are limited solely to the participants of this study, and are in no way intended as a representation beyond its scope. Based on comments of those who participated, Blackboard users feel the tool has a positive impact on their courses. Again, this implication is limited to the individuals who participated in this study.

Recommendations:

I would recommend conducting additional study of faculty perceptions of Blackboard and the use of technology, in general, to support instruction. Based on data collected for this study, and confined to the participants of this study, there seems to be some agreement about how technology and Blackboard are affecting instruction. I also recommend further analysis of the data collected in this study, and perhaps a continuation of the study through a larger population of faculty.

Summary and Conclusions:

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Through the course of this study, several themes emerged, some of which were given emphasis by most or all participants. Cross case analysis bears out that four of the five participants in this study made comments that reflect on *increases in productivity*, while all five made comments about increased *expectations or workload*, *flexibility*, and *expanded communication*. Also, three of the five participants mentioned the integration of video as a desired improvement to Blackboard. While there was no one category that holds more importance than the others, I noticed more enthusiasm about areas of *community development* and *new challenges / opportunities*. Four of five participants made comments in the *new challenges* category, with 20 separate total responses falling into the category. All five respondents made multiple references to *discussion boards and/or community development*, with a total of 25 responses in this category. Towards the end of each interview, I asked each participant a direct question about possible improvements or problems with Blackboard. As a result, the *negative aspects* category had responses from all five participants, totaling 25 responses, in all. It is important to note that many of these were suggestions for improvement, rather than problems related to the technology. From this experience, I have gained valuable insight into how our faculty views Blackboard. Of those who participated, faculty who used the system seem to rely on it heavily, some bordering on fanaticism. The lone participant who is not a user had good things to say about the product overall, with the exception of the time investment required to set up courses.

I also gathered from at least one participant, that this technology has given new life to instruction and changed their outlook. Given Dr. Green's comments, this may be a result of the technology, in general. Since the findings of this study are limited to its scope, perhaps more research is warranted in this area.

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